

**William Short to Thomas Jefferson, May 12, 1823,
from the Thomas Jefferson and William Short
Correspondence, Transcribed and Edited by Gerard W.
Gawalt, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress**

William Short to Thomas Jefferson

Philada. May 12. 1823

Dear Sir

If I could be induced by any means to attach any value to any prophecy of mine, it would be the having led you to give me your foresight into futurity. Although I am willing to take it with the prudent proviso which you annex to it, yet I value it most highly, as I have ever done what I have received from you for now near half a century. The ultra-mad ministers of France seem disposed to allow us full time for prediction. It could not have been supposed that they would have stopped so long on the border of the precipice. From a speech of my good friend Ilyde de Neuville, which I have just seen, it would seem there are deputies of the people more made than the ministers-for he reproaches them (though of his bord) with their timid delay.

What would please me the most, but which I expect the least, of every part of your predictions is that happy concert between the U.S. & England in doing away the least of contention as to Cuba. I desire this the more because I have long apprehended great difficulties from that source And indeed considering the manner in which our Government has conducted, as the Yankees say, I am only surprized these difficulties have not arrived already. The very idea, because useless, recognition of the independence of the Spanish colonies, was well calculated to hasten the transfer the island of Cuba, or if you please, the

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Mero castle, to the possession of England. And from this to the separation of the valley of the Mississippi from the old thirteen, "il n y a qu un pas" as Bonaparte said was the case 'du sublime a ridicule.' As a calm looker on I am really sometimes tempted to think I am taken a peep, if not [into a] lunatic, at least into an idiotic hospital. There are so many chances for the dissolution of the Union, that the "one thing needful" for every American statesman, it would seem to me, must be to diminish

their number, or weaken their effect. And yet in what Niche should we be obliged to place our riches if tied by that standard. I do not doubt their patriotism or their good intentions, but like Moliere's Bourgeois, they certainly "sont le prose sans le scavou."

There is one chance moreover which I fear it does not depend on them to remedy in any way-& that is the organization of the Executive. It has always appeared to me that that was the stumbling block of our political existence; & if I had ventured to communicate my predictions on this subject many years ago, time would now fortunately have proved how little foresight I had. I must take refuge therefore under the saving clause, of what has "happened to change the predicted course of events." Contrary to all expectation the Presidential plate has produced no content, except in the single instance between you & Mr. Adams. In every other case there was properly speaking, only one competitor entered-so that he had only to walk over the course alone & quietly take possession. How different is the prospect for the next race. My predicting phantasy is appalled at it & though very indifferent as to the homines yet I own I am not without serious anxiety as to the principle.

A much more agreeable subject to dwell on is the University. The late Legislature of the State, I understand, made a very liberal vote for completing the edifice. It will give me very great pleasure indeed to see it even in its present state as described by you. I can with ease in my mind's eye fill up the hiatus. I should however have still more pleasure to see it complete. I indulge the hope of seeing it in both states-for I still contemplate my autumnal visit to you. I had hoped ere this to be able to speak more particularly as to the time. I have been for a month back expecting here the agent of the tract where my

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presence is required during the summer, & I expected after some conversation with him to form a tolerably accurate estimate of the time required. There is much to be done & it is a kind of business with which I am little acquainted, & for which I have a great repugnance, insomuch that I am sometimes

tempted to renounce all attention to it, & letting it take its natural course, as heretofore, notwithstanding that course yields no income & on the contrary produces a constant outgoing for taxes & other expenses. I devoted the last summer as I shall do this, to attempt a revulsion of things, by my presence on the ground, & if that should fail I shall then give up all hope of a change for the better. Fortunately I am not as far embarked on this ocean of land (if it be not a bull) as to risk a complete ruin-but you would be surprised to see how many persons of most noble fortunes in the State of New York, have been absolutely reduced to poverty by the acquisition of extensive tracts of land, which in Virginia, on the contrary, has been the foundation of the largest fortunes in the State.

Although I should with great reluctance postpone my visit in the fall, yet I would not on any account that in the present state of things your trip to Bedford should be put to any hazard in this contingency. When I shall have arrived on the ground & reconnected a little, which will be in July or August I shall see my way more clearly & be able to speak more positively, & I will then not fail to write to you on the subject.

I am really much obliged to you for the hints as to the mode of shipping of my library. It will enable me to connect myself with the University in a degree, though a very light one & I shall be proud of every link that may attach to such an institution, which has been created as it were, & Centered by you.

What you say of the swelling of your hand & of its indefinite nature, I have learned with much pain-but I hope that your constitution & the pure air in which you live will both contribute to put an end to that state of things & restore the use of it completely. I need

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not say how happy I shall be to learn this from yourself, as you know the sentiments of invariable attachment with which I am, dear sir, Your friend & servant, WShort

RC (Jefferson Papers, DLC)